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A BRIEF STUDY OF

THE SOCIAL SERVICES CONCERNED WITH THE BLIND

OF

TOPEKA, KANSAS

JANUARY, 1937.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

This brief study was made at the request of the Council of Social Agencies, which, becoming conscious of the vital economic and emotional needs of Topeka's Blind citizens, felt that a survey of the social services concerned with the blind would more clearly indicate some feasible plan to alleviate their social condition. It is not at all necessary to put into words what any socially minded person interested in the blind problem knows is needed, but it is certainly advisable to give serious attention as to how this need shall be met.

Although realizing the confidence indirectly expressed by my being asked to conduct this important survey, I approached the study with a deep sense of humility. The uncompromising difficulties imposed by the time limits of the study, together with the vagaries of human nature, would tend to make the project seem impossible of achievement; yet throughout the survey, every agency, organization, civic body or individual contacted manifested an encouraging spirit of willingness to cooperate, and expressed confidence that the Council of Social Agencies would achieve some improved plan of promoting social work among the blind.

A conscientious effort has been made to rise above all disturbing details, (mothered by past unfortunate experiences), in an effort to present more clearly an unbiased, co-ordinated plan that will not only enhance the values of services now rendered, but at the same time will promote many undeveloped phases of social work among the blind.

The remarks herein given are based, wherever possible, upon official

reports or records, but for the most part upon information given verbally by informed persons. The report includes material which could rightfully be called needless repetition of well known and accepted facts. This apparent fault has been purposely included in order that those new to the work among the blind may have available condensed reference materials.

Although much credit is due to many for their courteous co-operation in assisting to make this survey a valuable contribution, names have been omitted wherever possible for obvious reasons.

It was not within the scope of this study to conduct a census of the blind of Topeka, but one has been started, using the standard census form recommended by the American Foundation for the Bling, Inc. When completed and placed with this study, the actual functioning detailed latter in the recommended plan can be evolved.

DEFINITIONS

It is exceedingly difficult to define or express a somewhat different connotation than is usually attached to words, but the attempt is here made in order to clarify the consideration given this study.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The broadest sense of the phrase is herein accepted. That is, all experiences made available from any source that contribute to the economic or emotional adjustments of the visually handicapped person. Thus any injurious experience could hardly be called a "service", although any effort made by society to neutralize the effect could be called a social service.

BLIND

Herein intended to denote any visually handicapped person whose affliction causes economic or emotional disturbances. Thus any person merely blind physically, suffering from no economic or emotional factors-(if there be such a person) is "not blind" from the social sense of the word. This "state of being" is the ultimate objective of any social program of blind work. The nearer the blind client approaches it, the more successful the effort. It

follows that the physically blind, social visioned person is much to be desired over the physically sighted, socially blind citizen.

LIFE-PATTERNS

The term suggests that the totality of experience creates real effects that mark the difference between qualities social or anti-social. Most adjustments are possible through beneficial activities and the use of inspiring life-patterns that will replace hopeless life-patterns.

SUCCESS

This quotation is from a book by Mr. R. S. French, Ph.D. entitled "From Homer to Helen Keller". No where can be found a better definition. "There are philosophers of the forge; there is a poem in every well wrought basket or rug; there is a real idyll in any small duty well done; and if we could but drop once for all those standards of evaluation which we have inherited from a feudal and aristrocratic society, the real worths might have fair chance of recognition." ------"By what criteria should the success of the blind be judged? On the whole these must not be very different from those by which we judge the seeing. Without dogmatic finality we may postulate the following as fundamental:

(1) The making of a decent living by giving value for value received.

(2) Contribution to the social whole in loyalty and good citizenship.

(3) A happy bearing and that degree of contentment that reflects cheer on one's associates;

(4) Physical health; and

(5) A moral tone sufficiently high to insure maintence of the "moral level" and a little more.

FIELD OF SURVEY

1. Provident Association.

2. Shawnee County Relief Administration.

3. Works Progress Administration.

4. National Youth Administration.

5. Kansas Emergency Relief Committee

6. Council of Social Agencies.

7. Lion's Club of Topeka.

8. Cooperative Club of Topeka.

9. "Good Cheer" -First Church of the Deaf-Blind.

10. Topeka Association of Blind For Service.

11. Topeka Association of Blind.

12. Topeka Free Fair Association.

13. Girl Scouts.

14. Red Cross.

15. Topeka Public Library.

16. Interested Community Leaders.

17. Social Security Legislation Leaders.

18. City Offices.

19. Blind Leaders of Topeka.

20. Various outlets for the sale of blind products.

21. Local newspapers.

Other very important contacts could not be arranged within the time limits of the study, but it is felt that the attitude of the community as a whole was reflected by those included above.

BASIS OF INQUIRY

The approach of inquiry was centered on the following four points:

1. Past experiences with work among the blind.
2. Reactions, both positive and negative, as to results obtained.
3. Social services now being rendered to the blind.
4. Willingness to be a part in the development of a coordinated, community wide program of social services among the blind.

SOCIAL WORK PREMISES

Before proceeding, it seems well first to clarify the more important

principles that have governed the recommendations later given.

BLIND AS A CLASS

"Blind as a class" is merely a convenient collective term. Usually when a group of the blind are "segregated", the one common factor is their blindness. Even this will vary from total blindness to the more inconvenient visual handicap. Again there will be great divergence in collateral health effects, age of loss of sight, education, race or various other factors that emphatically point out that the blind cannot easily be classified as such. The blind are a part of society, contributing to and receiving from the general welfare, just as the sighted do. Blind persons should not be "segregated", but so far as possible be integrated with society, society with whom they work and live. The need of specialized service to the blind has been more the result of popular misconceptions concerning blindness among both the sighted and the blind, than the mere inability to see.

SIXTH SENSE

The so-called "sixth sense" is not an extra kind compensation that nature will bestow on those deprived of sight if only they will patiently wait. It is a particular ability to place added attention upon details received through the remainin g senses and it should be cultivated through definate training. The "thwarted feelings" of many blind persons can be replaced with confidence if proper intrepretations are given to the remaining sense stimuli.

LIFE-PATTERNS.

Particular emphasis needs to be placed on this term. A very common error of organizations serving the blind is to assume that their benefits will answer in totality the client's need. Thus broom shops assume that the answer to blindness is to make better broom makers of the blind. To musical organizations, the answer to blindness is to make musicians of the blind. Even when sussessful, such organizations are merely contributing a positive factor to the blind client's life pattern. His ultimate success often rests upon a

completely different factor. This is not said in disparagement of the many fine endeavors and accomplishments of service organizations. It has been called to attention that it might be said that the acceptable modern trend is to create a force within a community that will coordinate the entire social services concerned with the blind. This is the kind of social service that makes those dependent on charity, independent of charity's by products, such as lack of initiative, laziness and that "society-owes-me-a-living" feeling.

BLIND PRIDE

The blind person rarely, of his own initiative, avails himself of social services being offered, even if he is in great need. He requires the guidance of an understanding friend, (not a coddler--talking baby talk), to work out his life-pattern. Naturally this will seem strange to many who have observed long lines of relief clients more or less maliciously stampeding every available service or commodity distribution office, but records will bear out the statement.

COOPERATIVE PRODUCTION

Although the one hundred per cent blind made product field is very small, and the sales possibilities even smaller, there are unlimited possibilities in cooperative production. That is the joint labor of sighted handicapped persons, such as cripples, with the blind, each complementing the labor of the other with his efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. COMMUNITY WIDE PLANNING

It is recommended that the life-pattern of a blind individual be considered more important than the specialized service of any agency or organization involved.

USE OF OPPORTUNITIES

It is recommended that the community accept the responsibility of assisting the blind to make full use of every available social service being

offered, either by local agencies, by the state, or by some national organization.

3. EXTENSION OF SERVICE

It is recommended that the community create a means of coordinating a more complete economic and emotional service to the visually handicapped of Topeka.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that a Supervisor of work among the blind be employed by and be responsible to the private family agency, under the administration of which the plan suggested should be developed.

A. Suggested qualifications. (Importance as listed)

1. Satisfactory background in social work.
2. Executive business ability.
3. One to whom work among the blind appeals.
4. Trained recreational leader.
5. Experienced public speaker.
6. Some knowledge of crafts.
7. Deep sense of cooperation.

B. Duties

1. To maintain close contact with the blind, promoting their life adjustments by giving them new interests and new hopes.
2. To keep expenses within the alloted budget.
3. To coordinate the social services of the community and to make available those phases of life-patterns not now offered.
4. To operate a training and experimental craft department where the blind may receive occupational and therapeutic training.
5. To assist the blind in the sale of their products thru exhibits, demonstrations, wholesale contracts, etc.
6. To make an intensive study of social work among the blind.
7. To cooperate in every way possible with any agency, organization, or individual who, properly motivated, wishes to serve the interests of the blind.
8. To further proper legislation for the blind.
9. To conduct an industrial survey as a possible outlet for blind labor or products.
10. To carry on a publicity program of the educational type to correct misconceptions concerning the blind and blindness.

2. It is recommended that the private family agency assume the responsibility of all necessary case work, clerical or other services such

as are regularly assumed under ordinary intake routine.

3. It is recommended that a department of the blind budget be drawn up and funds made available, covering in particular the following items:

1. Salary of the Supervisor.
2. Transportation costs.
3. Home teaching materials.
4. Craft training supplies.
5. All necessary added costs not now in the regular service budget items of the family agency.

4. It is recommended that an Advisory Committee be appointed by the President of the private family agency to counsel with the Executive Secretary and the Supervisor of Work among the Blind in the development of the suggested plan. This advisory board should consist of the following:

1. Lawyer.
2. Sales manager.
3. Recreational leader.
4. Doctor.
5. Minister.
6. Financial expert.
7. Journalist.
8. Members of interested civic bodies.
9. Social worker.
10. Laymen at large.

The assistance of such a group both as individuals and as a body is invaluable.

5. It is recommended that the Supervisor of Blind Work affiliate with state and national organizations and make a full use of available services.

6. It is recommended that a craft workroom, (not a manufacturing concern,) be provided for the occupational and therspeutic training of blind persons. Eligibility for admittance shall be determined by the case work department of the private family agency.

Note.- The Supervisor of Work among the Blind should assist only in the capacity of teacher, advisor, friend, or possibly banker to the client who when trained may operate his own business, buying materials, hiring help, etc., just as any business man would.

7. It is recommended that any public gathering of the blind be held in suitable church rooms or other available conference places, such as can usually be arranged with local Y. M. C. A.'s or hotels.

8. It is recommended that all executive officers of social agencies concerned with the blind plan the functioning of their services to enhance the value of the community-wide plan herein suggested.

9. It is recommended that a copy of this report be placed in the hands of all interested persons, organizations, or civic bodies.

SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that a fireproof workroom be immediately provided the W. P. A. craft shop.

> Note:-This effort is worthy of greater appreciation and support by the community. The obvious hazards being risked by these blind workers are not at all necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

I have nothing but commendation for the noble efforts now being exerted to serve the interests of the blind in Topeka. They are motivated by a sincere desire to produce an uplifting influence upon visually handicapped persons. There have been in the past many frictions that have been locally considered quite grave. To my mind, their very seriousness is but a positive symptom of the real economic and emotional need of the blind of Topeka for a specialized community wide social service. Social organizations come into being when there is developed within the community the consciousness of a need. Topeka is now conscious of the "blind" need. The new blind work is now properly motivated. It will grow, expand, and fit it's clients for the business of life and it's living.

It must ever be borne in mind that the business of living is a personal responsibility. The phrase "to serve" does not have the connotation of "to command" assumed by many social agencies. If we assume a "command" responsibility for an individual's economic and emotional experiences, even victory will taste sour in his mouth. Intelligent leaders of the blind are struggling to teach their clients that it is a thrilling adventure to use their "Second Best".

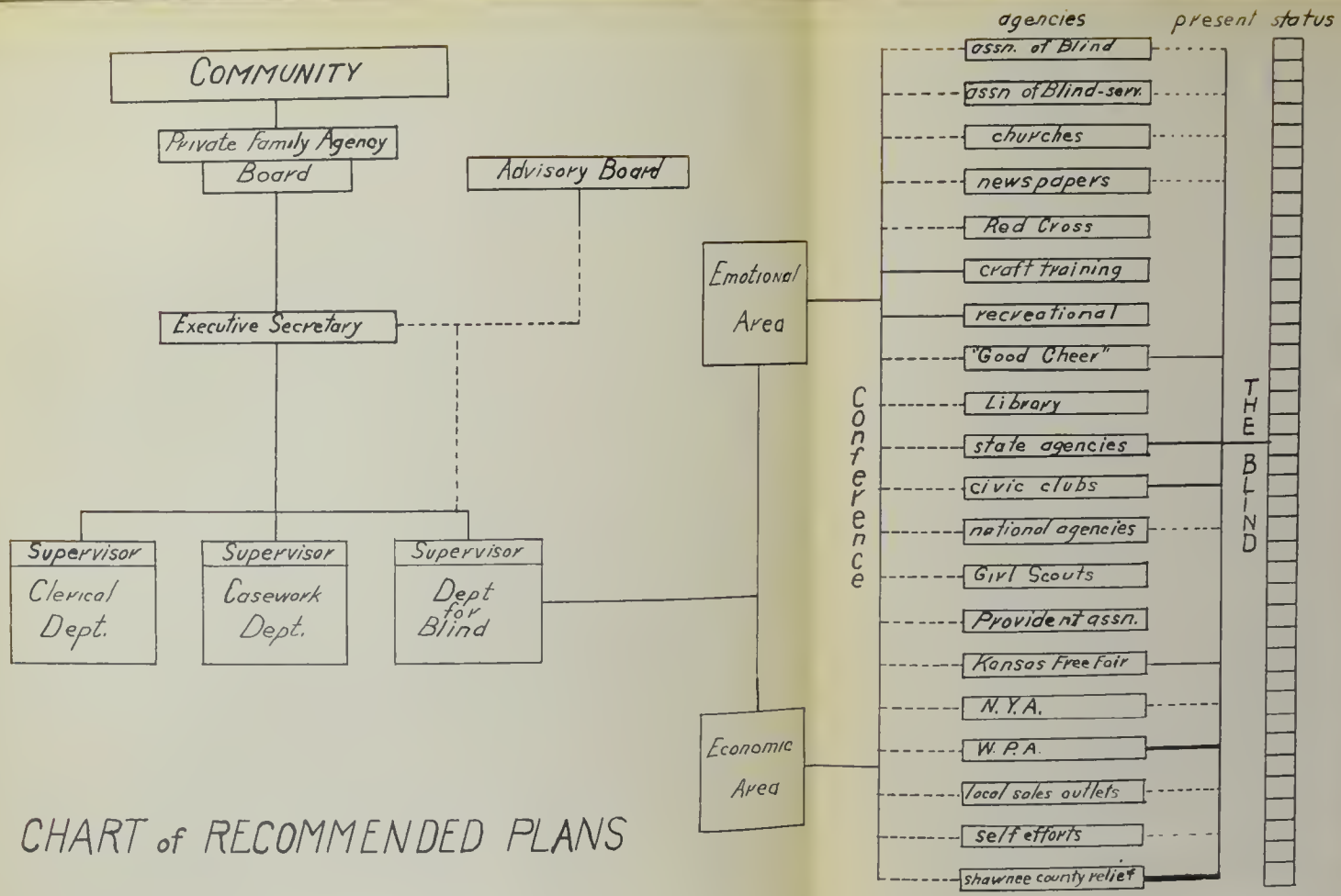

CHART of RECOMMENDED PLANS

DIRECTORY OF NATIONAL AGENCIES FOR THE BLIND

The American Association of Workers for the Blind
State Office Building, Hartford, Conn.

The American Bible Society
Bible House, Astor Place, New York, N. Y.

The American Brotherhood for the Blind
218 South Wabash Ave., Chicago, Illinois

The American Foundation for the Blind, Inc.
15 West 16th Street, New York, N. Y.

The Braille Bible Society, Inc.
739 North Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, California

The Braille Institute of America, Inc.
741 North Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, California

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind
186 Beverley Street, Toronto, Ontario

The Christian Science Literature for the Blind
1 Norway Street, Boston, Mass.

The Clovernook Home for the Blind
Mt. Healthy, Ohio

The Gospel Trumpet Company
Anderson, Indiana

The Jewish Braille Institute of America, Inc.
1825 Harrison Avenue, New York, N. Y.

The John Milton Foundation
210 Bible House, Astor Place, New York, N. Y.

The National Braille Press, Inc.
110 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass.

The National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, Inc.
50 West 50th Street, New York, N. Y.

The New York Association for the Blind, Inc.
111 East 59th Street, New York, N. Y.

The New York Bible Society
5 East 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

The Protestant Episcopal Church
Committee on Literature for the Blind
281 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

The Seeing Eye, Inc.
Whippany Road, Morristown, New Jersey

The Theosophical Book Association for the Blind
184 South Oxford Avenue, Los Angeles, California

The Matilda Ziegler Magazine for the Blind
Monsey, New York, N. Y.

COMMERCIAL ADDRESSES

Local firms should be given first consideration but often do not handle needed supplies or equipment. This brief list includes only a very few well known companies which have shown a fine cooperative spirit towards organizations serving the blind.

American Rattan & Reed Mfg. Co., Brooklyn, N. Y.

American Reedcraft Corporation, 130 Beekman St., New York, N. Y.

Reed Loom Co., Springfield, Ohio

Grand Rapids Fibre and Cord Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Structo Mfg. Co., Freeport, Ill. (Looms)

Mc-Callum & Robertson, Inc., Memphis, Tenn. (Mop yarns)

Emile Bernat & Sons Co., Jamaica Plain, Mass. (Weaving yarns)

Bibb Mfg. Co., Macon, Ga. (Filler yarns and warp)

E. W. Twitchell, Inc. 3rd & Somerset Sts., Philadelphia, Pa. (Cellophane)

The Magnus Brush and Craft Materials, Wakefield, Mass. Box 96

The Handcrafter, Waupun, Wis.

J. L. Hammett Co., Kendall Square, Cambridge, Mass.

Heywood Wakefield Co., 666 Lake Shore Drive, Chicago. (Basketry)

Fellowcrafter's, Inc., 64 Stanhope St. Boston, Mass. (Craft materials)

Delta Specialty Co., 62 E. Randolph St., Chicago Ill. (Machinery)

Graton & Knight, Worchester, Mass. (Leather)

Walco Bead Co., 101 West 37th. St., New York City, N. Y.

Lussky, White & Coolidge, Inc., 71 W. Lake St., Chicago, Ill. (Upholstery materials)